THE HUMAN PROVINCE

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FOR VEZA CANETTI

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Preface

This volume contains my jottings from 1942 to 1972. Thirty years of a conscious life are a long time. My aim was to make my own choice and presentation of this entire period. Whatever these years may have been like (and I have never concealed their terror, which I perceived as my own), I have to be grateful for experiencing them with an *alert* mind. If such a summing-up appears rather erratic, it is close to each moment in every sentence and it does contain the truth of *one* man.

I would like to describe the background of these jottings with the same words that prefaced one of my earlier volumes. Since their contents, from the years 1942 to 1960, have largely been included here, I may be permitted a briefer repetition of these words.

I realized that *Crowds and Power* might absorb me for several more decades. And the concentration on a single work, as well as a sort of prohibition that I placed on any other and especially a purely literary work, exerted a pressure that eventually took on dangerous dimensions. A safety valve was indispensable, and I found it, at the start of 1942, in my jottings. Their freedom and spontaneity, the conviction that they existed only for their own sake and served no purpose, my irresponsibility in never reading them again or changing them in any way, saved me from a fatal paralysis.

Gradually, they became an indispensable daily exercise. I felt that a special part of my life went into them. They ultimately grew into many volumes, and this presentation is merely a meager selection.

In late 1948, after lengthy preliminary work, I began to write *Crowds and Power*. This stretched over many years. There were qualms and doubts, and when the delays became perilous, I permitted myself, very rarely, to do some literary writing. It was only in 1959 that I could get myself to finish the manuscript that I regarded as my life's work. It is not surprising that a great deal of that opus flowed into the jottings that I regularly committed to paper during those years.

The reader should not be denied the adventure of encountering a few

1947

Any page of a philosophy, no matter where we open it, puts us at *ease:* the dense coherence of a net, that was so obviously woven outside of reality, the disregard of the moment, that grand scorn for the world of feelings, which keeps ebbing and flowing even in the philosopher, that security of semblance which sees through itself in counterglow, *gegenschein,* and yet will not cease, that incessant intertwining with all previous ideas, so that one reaches out and senses: this kind of mat, this very kind, has been woven for thousands of years now, and only the patterns change; what handicraft has survived this well, what pottery was ever practiced uninterruptedly in the very same way? Whatever philosophy one deals with, whether because one knows it better or because one doesn't know it at all, it is basically always the same: an emphasis on just a few selected words, saturated with the juices of all others, and their meandering continuation.

A decree making *misers* pay double for everything.

Avarice is regarded as a moral disease, those suffering from it are publicly declared to be misers and have to wear a special mark. Instead of by origin, people are distinguished by their social qualities. The mark of avarice can never be removed. Misers wear it in the street; they grow accustomed to it; what they do not grow accustomed to is their treatment in shops. They have to enter in such a way that the proprietor cannot possibly doubt their avarice. They have to watch as customers standing next to them pay only half the price for the same articles. They cannot grumble; otherwise, by law, they have to pay extra. These severe measures against avarice have the strangest effects. Some misers try hard to become spendthrifts and, above all, to prove it. Their efforts have an athletic character: when they throw away their money, they look as if they were hoisting heavy iron dumbbells to hurl at other people's heads. Some are so despondent over the higher prices that their avarice seems more and more justified to them, and they buy

less and less from day to day. They soon run about like wretched shadows; they replace the poor, but such paupers are loathed with good reason.

A religion in which the sinner has to fix his penitence himself, otherwise it's ineffective.

The tantrum of a thief who is *given* everything.

Myths signify more to me than words, and that's the greatest difference between Joyce and myself. But I also have a different kind of respect for words. Their integrity is almost sacrosanct for me. I am reluctant to cut them up, and even their oldest forms, those that were really employed, command my awe, I don't like to take them into disastrous adventures. Their is something eery *in* words, and I do not want to tear out this heart of theirs like a Mexican sacrificial priest; such bloody ways are hateful to me. The eeriness should only be depicted in characters, be presented in terms of them, never in terms of words as such. There is something deceptive in words alone, without the lips that uttered them. As a writer, I am still living in the age before writing, in the age of *shouts.*

We look better to ourselves in foreign languages; that's why we quickly, and immediately, learn their curse words.

When he hasn't read for a long time, the holes get bigger in the sieve of his mind, and everything goes through and nothing, except for the grossest things, seems to exist there. What he has read serves to catch his experiences; and without reading, he doesn't experience.

I like any scornful statement I find about the general character of writers; for instance, recently, in Pascal: "Poète et non honnête homme." I fully realize how onesided and unfair this judgment is, even in Plato, but something inside me says: "Yes, yes, dammit, a poet." It's probably the writer's vanity, his thirst for fame, his conceitedness that make me uncomfortable; whereas I certainly don't reject his vast possibilities of metamorphosis. A good number of living writers that I have met were people I didn't like for some reason or other; but perhaps it was because one might prefer being the only one. Yet what I

read about earlier poets almost never displeases me; it can be any of myriad things, but it always moves me; even Baudelaire, whose life style was hardly attractive, has been dear to me ever since I learned *more* about him. Even the poet's unsureness and tentativeness towards anything concrete has something that captivates me. The thing that takes me by storm, however, is the richness of their illusions about everything that happens to them. Usually, in order to think all sorts of things, they imagine the wrong thing about what concerns them. What is so lovely, so captivating about that? The wealth of illusions or their failure? I can't decide. But I know that in "normal," in ordinary people, who adjust to everyday life, the most disconcerting thing of all is the way everything fits in with everything else from hour to hour, the way everything is right for them in the short run. They climb into a tram and reach their destination. They are employed and actually get to the office. Something has a price and they know the price. They like a woman and they marry her. They have certain streets, but only to get somewhere; not like people like us, who prefer only streets leading us nowhere. If the poets merely always got lost, you couldn't say anything against them. But the fact that they turn this into something distinctly admirable makes their getting lost not as serious as it ought to be. Poets who die young are not sufficiently experienced in spreading their tails; hence, what we know about them remains lovable. The others, who rise to a bird's-eye view of themselves become more and more repulsive and despicable from year to year. One would like to knock the handicraft, which makes them so conceited, out of their heads, and the superfluous years out of their lives.

Each man is meant to be the keeper of several lives, and woe unto him if he fails to find the lives he has to keep. Woe unto him if he does a bad job of keeping those he finds.

Oh night and two lights, four lights, eight, until each has gotten the other to think.

To feel death constantly without sharing one of the comforting religions. What a gamble, what a dreadful gamble!

Even if not having to die were physiologically possible today, it could well be that no human being would have the moral strength to elude death—simply because there are so many dead people.

Freedom is every new face, so long as it cannot speak to you. Freedom is everyone before you who doesn't know you. Freedom is the populated space that does not yet contract, in which you do not suffocate. You are free as long as you do not enter other people's reckonings. You are free wherever you are not loved. The chief vehicle of unfreedom is your name. Whoever doesn't know your name, has no power over you. But many people will know it, more and more; to remain free against their united power is the almost unattainable goal of your life.

To become better? Even if you succeeded, you would not be better in a different situation, hence you would not have become better, merely cunning.

God, if God existed, would be the being without fear; acting without fear, resting without fear; creating and commanding without fear; punishing and rewarding without fear; promising without fear; forgetting without fear. That would be God, that would be an immense, a powerful God. The others, the alleged gods, writhe and collapse in fear. What do they have over us?

God's yearning for the world as it was before he created it.

Death has his own way of sneaking into his enemies, undermining their will to fight, demoralizing them; he keeps offering himself as a radical solution, he reminds us that there is not a single real solution outside of him. The man who lives with the rigid stare of hatred upon him grows accustomed to him as the sole zero point. But the way that zero grows! The way one suddenly trusts it because one cannot trust anything else! The way one thinks to oneself: that is left when nothing else is left. He topples whatever stands near you, and once you're almost ready to give up in pain, he says with a smile: You are not as powerless as you may think, you can throw yourself, and your suffering, over. He causes the suffering from which *he* then can save you. What torture judge has ever understood his office better?

When I read about sacred things, their memory takes hold of me only because they were sacred, and so long as they breathe within me I remain calm. Oh, the peace they must have had when they were unchallenged, whole golden apples, deeply fragrant and round. I seek after all holinesses, and they break my heart for being past. I find

nothing for later, I have called death naked, woe unto the man who has summoned him naked. The sacred things were his garments; so long as he was garbed, even men, those eternal murderers, lived unruffled, and nothing would have happened to them if they had not torn off his garments, those plunderers, those brigands—wasn't murdering enough for them!? I myself was one of the worst. I wanted to be bold, so I said: "Death, death, and nothing else." What is boldness, and how much more was caution. But we have become powerful, so we have dragged him forth, we have pulled death out of all hiding-places, there is no hiding-place we do not know now. We scorn hell, but didn't it at least come *after* death. What suffering would not be better than nothing. Boldness, oh stupid boldness, we have fallen into the shears of your vanity, nothing, nothing has remained unshorn, and no dying man knows where he is going.

A God who keeps his Creation a *secret*. "And lo, it was not good."

Most of all I dislike ideas if they turn out to be correct too soon. What's the use of saying something if it turns out to be right within two years?

The words you fail to find with some people come to you later, after leaving them. These words derive from the daze caused by a person's presence. Without this daze, those words would never come; but one feature of them is that they cannot be here at once. I believe it is these vehement but delayed words that make up the poet.

The shrieks ought to be over; but I still hear the silence of the executed.

To depict a man in whom everything instantly *passes*, every impression, every experience, every situation. A man in whom nothing persists. Today and yesterday and tomorrow are not connected for him in any way. Everything has happened to him, nothing has happened to him. His freshness. His mortality driven to such an extreme that it too is meaningless. He knows everyone and can't remember anyone. He lives in a world without names. He is unafraid, but no one is afraid of him. His age and sex are unclear. He has neither goals nor plans, one never has the feeling he is reaching for one. He can't become obnoxious. He

lacks any religion. The instants he consists of are incalculable. Anyone looking for him will always find him somewhere else.

I hate people who build fast systems, and I will see to it that mine never fully closes.

All the places that words have been to! In what mouths! On what tongues! Who can, who may know them all, after these wanderings through hell, after these dreadful abysses. Words have a twofold existence: each word is trapped and squeezed together inside us; but we are squeezed together inside each word. The many words, and each one double: tortured and torturing, a victim and victimizer, dense and hollow.

To think that no one has yet heard the true words, the words for whose sake people hear at all, that all people hear and hear and wait for these real words. Until someone finally hears them, his ears will change into wings, and so will the ears of others.

The astonishing thing about distrust is the distrust of the completed event, of the *fact*. One can distrust the ill will of a person close to one, his betrayal, his two facedness, his trickery, for a long time without evidence. One can then suddenly hear the dreaded things from his own lips, as a confession in a dream, for instance, so that not even the shadow of a doubt is possible. The lover may drop the pet name of the lover she is deceiving you with. But the moment it is certain, it no longer seems true. As long as you lacked proof, you had to believe it. As soon as you had proof, you couldn't believe it. It is as though faith were only there to make something true, as though the thing made true were no longer of interest; as though you released the air in your fist as soon as this air hardened into stone.

A man who is immortal by the millimeter.

Fear has something that wants to hear, no matter what, hear desperately. Everything to be heard is all right then, the good, the bad, things avoided, things feared. When fear is greatest, one would accept a command to murder simply in order to hear.

When there was war, we had to hold our tongues; shame and despair seemed legitimate. The war is over and now we know the full measure of our own impotence, which, back then, we ascribed to violence and isolation.

If one knows a lot of people, it seems almost blasphemous to invent more.

The soothing aspect of Antiquity: its not being a *threat* to modern man. Its threats have long since recollected themselves; they cut off nobody's breath. We are an instrument on which Antiquity can keep playing; it knows us and plays us properly. We have been thought up by Antiquity, unstrenuously, one of its many flukes. It despises us and is no longer domineering.

The days of the year as a pack of cards. One can pull out one or the other, keep it, play it, and then reshuffle. No day is the cause of a coming day; they begin arbitrarily next to one another, each time differently. They repeat themselves, but one recognizes them in a different sequence each time. How much more intelligently one would treat one's days if they were repeatable; if one would understand them, how close one would get to them, validly, in their constantly changing forms. Now, however, with our custom of progressing and unrepeatable days, one remains their sad dilettante.

Kafka truly lacks any writer's vanity, he never boasts, he cannot boast. He sees himself as small and proceeds in small paces. Wherever he sets his foot, he senses the uncertainty of the ground. It does not carry anyone, when you are with him then nothing carries you. Thus he forgoes the illusion and delusion of poets. Their brilliance, which he certainly felt, is lost for his own words. One has to walk the small paces with him and one becomes modest. There is nothing in modern literature that makes one this modest. He reduces the swelled head of every life. One turns good when reading him, but without being proud of it. Sermons make the moved listeners proud, Kafka forgoes sermons. He does not transmit his father's commandments; a strange obduracy, his greatest gift, permits him to interrupt the chain of commandments handed down from fathers to sons. He eludes their violence; their external energy, its animal quality, wafts away. He deals all the more

with their content. The commandments become qualms for him. Of all writers, he is the only one never to be infected by power; he never exercises any kind of power whatsoever. He has stripped God of the final vestiges of fatherliness. What remains is a dense and indestructible net of qualms concerning life rather than the demands of his begetter. The other poets imitate God and act like Creators. Kafka, who never wants to be a god, is never a child either. What some people see as terrifying in him and what disturbs me too is his constant adulthood. He thinks without commanding, but also without playing.

God is supposedly not a Creator: supposedly he is, above all, an enormous resistance, protecting the world against us; slowly he yields; we human beings grow more powerful; until we have become so powerful as to destroy the world, and ourselves, and him.

Lecture by a blind man. A blind pianist, married to a singer, and whom I've known for a long time, gave a lecture on blindness yesterday. He emphasized how satisfied he is with his condition. All people are friendly to him and his wife; that's the reason for the confidence and good cheer of blind people. He spoke with a propriety and modesty that seemed familiar; it occurred to me that his were the general characteristics of the Englishman. He never looked to the right, he never looked to the left, he never looked around or forward—if one could say that about him; however, he saw his definite goals as well and as surely as a seeing Englishman. He wasn't curious, he wasn't arrogant; he wasn't the least bit thrown by his wife's later crisscross talk. His acknowledgement of the rest of the world, to which he had to adjust—the world of the seeing—was as practical and natural as the acknowledgement of the world around him is for any normal Englishman. He incessantly performed proud small bows to the others and apologized for almost nonexistent offenses. He stressed the pleasure of his independence, he was as free as anyone else; he earned his living honestly and by himself.

I would like to describe him and his lecture very accurately. But what I want to depict now are a few strange features in the life of the blind, features that were new to me. For him, a strong wind is what fog is for other people. It makes him feel totally disoriented and lost. Loud noises pour in on him from all sides, streaming into one, and he simply doesn't know where he is. For while walking he always relies on

a sure sense of the nearness of objects. He senses the nearness of a wall or a table. He always halts right in front of it and never bumps into it. This faculty must somehow be auditive, for it always ceases when he has a cold and his ear is out of commission.

He does have *one* pleasure over people who can see. He can listen to several conversations at once and pluck out whatever he enjoys. The seeing, who rest their eyes on the people they talk to are, he said, therefore unable to eavesdrop on other conversations next to or behind them.

He can tell a person's mood and character by his voice. They had already done this as a game at the school for the blind; they would judge people on the spot solely by their voice and the way they talked, and whatever they managed to find out later always fitted in with their first judgment. Blind women, he said, have a harder time than blind men. A man who can see is seldom willing to marry a blind woman, it's too much trouble.

It's difficult for blind people to have *gestures*. He had once performed in a play, and they had to teach him every single movement artificially. It was incredible how awkwardly he acted. But here too he saw an advantage for blind people. They save energy that other people squander on useless gestures.

The deaf are far worse off than the blind. They are, so to speak, blind in all directions. Towards the back, the side, and the front. The blind man, however, is blind in only one direction, since he can hear anywhere.

He cannot imagine colors at all; but he is deeply interested in everything concerning the fine arts and likes to hear about them. His inner vision is neither dark nor light, something peculiar in between, which he cannot really describe.

If no one could see, then the blind too would be lost. But since everyone would be blind, all would be lost. One wonders how long people, if an accident struck them all blind, could get along with the memories of the seeing time. A hoard of old experiences would have to be carefully guarded and handed on. It would gradually assume the character of a religious revelation; just as the followers of a faith tell about the miracles experienced by its earliest founders. One could imagine that the memory of people who could see and the things they saw would hold the blind together for many centuries. It would be strange if suddenly

a single one of them could see again and told all the others about the truth of their old faith.

The cardinal question of all ethics: Should we tell people how bad they are? Or should we let them be bad in their innocence? To answer this question, one would first have to decide whether the knowledge of their badness would give people the possibility of becoming better, or whether this very knowledge would make their badness ineradicable. It could very well be that badness had to remain bad once it is separated and designated as such; it could then conceal itself, but it would exist forever.

Three basic attitudes of a man when wooing: the boaster, the promiser, the mother-beggar.

The man who is accustomed to his own thinking can be saved from despair by only one thing: the communication that he deprives others of, that he registers only for himself and forgets, that he rediscovers later and only in amazement. For everything he consciously continues, about which he keeps thinking daily, consistently, increases his entanglement in the world, which afflicts him. He can remain free only by thinking to no avail. His contradictions have to save him, their diversity, their unfathomable absurdity. For the creative man becomes the victim of his precision; his poison is the continuation in which he entangles himself; even reading becomes his *own* continuation, as though the pages he turns were modeled within him. Only one thing can help him: the self-created chaos of his thoughts to the extent that they remain isolated, uncontinued, forgotten.

One needs friends mainly in order to become more impudent, that is, more oneself. One practices one's boastings in front of them, one's highhandedness, one's vanities; in front of them, one acts worse and better than one really is. One is not ashamed of any untruth: the friend who knows one, knows how true it could become. The general rules and customs one usually has to observe bore the friend, who in orderly moments of his life practices them as well as anyone. So long as he is with you, he will ignore them; the freedom he grants you is something you give back to him. He is quite satisfied; he too likes to be himself.

It is very odd to think that there are people among us who view human bodies in all details day by day, ugly, unclothed, deformed bodies, of every sex and age, and they never have enough of them: doctors. In between, they sit among us, with innocent faces and speak to us like other people, and we don't fear them, we greet them and amicably shake hands.

How much I would like to listen to myself as a stranger, without recognizing myself, and only find out later that it was I.

To see all the people we know as twins: each person has his twin aspect, each seeks himself as another; since he is different from everyone else, he seeks himself in a different way. For most people this search is a healthy thing. For those who are really twins, however, the search is confused: what they could be looking for already exists, as a false compulsion.

To invent a new music, in which the notes are in sharpest contrast to the words, thereby changing the words, rejuvenating them, filling them with a new content. To remove the danger from words, with music. To give words new dangers, with music. To make words hateful, make words popular, with music. To smash words, unite words, with music.

If man were better, he wouldn't need music. It is also the wickedness in people that makes them like music so much. What might they think of themselves if they didn't have music? A murderer would manage to comfort himself if he got to listen to the right music. During music, all values and judgments are different, erased, raised, refilled, fulfilled, whatever we think signifies less or more; above all, new connections are possible, and under such auspices they seem everlasting.

There is no great wish that we do not have to pay for. But its highest price is that it comes true.

One can want to know more and more; but there is a point at which this knowledge becomes unbearable and takes revenge for having found so many things already there.

To get to know countries as if no others existed; but to get to know many.

In order to live, one has to be aware of various injustices; some of them have to have been committed and concluded; others, still open, have yet to be committed. The amount of injustice resulting from both directions must not be too large or too small. A saint has to devise artificial sins. The man who can honestly tell himself: "I haven't done any evil," is lost. For evil exists and has its claim; and there are sound reasons why the faith in original sin has gained such prestige.

The disappointing thing about languages: they seem so obliging with their sounds and words and rules, and yet one can say just about the same thing, in a completely different way, in another language.

The only interesting thing about translating is what is lost; to find it, one ought, now and then, to translate.

The countless countries one longs for still exist, the shape and hardness of their mountains, the windings of their rivers, and the transparent cities, full of chatty people, who die at different times, not all at once, not all suddenly; one can still be confused by the supposed meanings of their words and the absurdity of their destinies; everything is still richer, gaudier, more varied than ever, right before it becomes all one and comes to an end.

It's best to be among people you'll never see again; you can stand them as long as you think they'll never do anything to you.

You can't keep living in a truly beautiful city: it drives out all your yearning.

There's nothing harder to control than learning, the passion for meaningless learning, as though one were the first man and had to store the knowledge of all coming people for them. One fails to get used to the thought that one is actually the last rather than the first man.

To undo something as though it had never happened, a single event, a single tiny incident, almost nothing: the story of a man who wants to undo such a nothing. His desperate efforts; just as others go after a specific goal in enigmatic concentration, something they have to gain or have, so too this man has a negative goal, to remove something from the sequence of his experiences and throw it aside.

But it has to be something nugatory, not a sin; for sins have definite atonements.

Old threats, like boiled fish—you can take out the bones.

When you've made a lot of words, you lose your sense of how much they mean to others. Thus begins the actual wickedness of the word-man.

Ever since I saw a human stomach, nine-tenths of a human stomach within less than two hours after it was cut out, I know even less why we eat. It looked just like the pieces of meat that people roast in their kitchens, it was even the size of an ordinary schnitzel. Why does this like come to like? Why the circuitous route? Why must meat incessantly go through the bowels of other meat? Why must this in particular be the condition of our life?

A town in which the people become as old as one loves them. Like and dislike balance each other exactly, and the result decides the length of a life.

Sometimes a man leaves his best on the street, like an old newspaper, and someone else comes along, notices it's a newspaper in a language he doesn't know, and he stomps on it angrily in order to make it dirtier.

There is a point at which one dare not experience anything else if all earlier things are to have a peaceful and unequivocal meaning. For those earlier things are changed by further events and influences; they aren't totally lost, but they change so greatly that their uniqueness is lost. Metamorphoses make use of what already exists; nothing is really changed back. The ability to recognize the stations at which only looking back and expressing are allowed may be considered the acme of the poetic art of life. In reality, one misses most of one's works because one is after more things. This hunger for an immensity in oneself, for a store of the living world, which store would remain in existence even if the world didn't—this hunger is wonderful and quite worthy of a human being, and yet, once aroused, it cannot be sated, and the man who is driven by it has no choice but to outwit it from time to time and lull it to sleep.

In the stillness, at night, when all the people he knows well are asleep, he becomes a better person.

The resurrected suddenly begin accusing God in all languages: the true Last Judgment.

One could wish for a world that is completely untouched; whose existence we never suspected; on which we had no influence; we as unknown to it as it to us: unapproached by any legend: nowhere expected; and yet comprehensible to us when it suddenly comes to our aid, giving us, the suffocating, giving us new souls together with the eyes to make that world visible for us.

There is nothing more dreadful than the sight of a dying enemy; I will never understand why all the enmity in the world hasn't ended for that very reason. One sees the dying man's face, but one doesn't see the place where one has hit him. Yet how one feels, how one feels the slightest pinprick one has ever given him, and how one feels that, but for the pinprick, he might perhaps have lived for three more full instants.

The deepest meaning of asceticism is that it engenders compassion. The eating man has less and less compassion, and finally none.

A man who wouldn't have to eat and yet thrives, who behaves like a human being, intellectually and emotionally, although he never eats—that would be the highest moral experiment conceivable; and only its fortunate solution could make one seriously think of overcoming death.

The stupidest things are *complaints*. People are always grumbling about someone. Someone or other has been presumptuous. Someone or other has done us wrong. How dare they, what's the meaning of this, and that's one thing we won't put up with. This petty nonsense gyrates in your head, petty, for it concerns you yourself, and really only the least part of your person, the ever artificial border. These complaints fill up one's life as though they were words of wisdom. They take over like vermin, they multiply faster than lice. You go to sleep with them, you wake up with them; that's all that human "business life" consists of.

How is it possible that we put torn things in our mouths, tear them and tear up some more, and then have words coming from the same

mouths? Wouldn't everything be better if we had a different aperture for food and used our mouths only for words? Or does this intimate blend of all sounds that we form, with lips, teeth, tongue, throat, the very parts of the mouth that serve eating—does this blend express the fact that language and food must forever be connected, that we can never become anything better or nobler than we are, that basically, in all disguises, we always say the same terrible and bloody things, and that we feel nausea only when there's something wrong with the food?

Then along came a man who proved that all experiments, from the very first, precisely because of the very first, were wrong; that later, they were right in themselves, in their sequence, and no one had noticed the mistake only because the first experiment had gone unchallenged. Thus the entire technological world was exposed as a fiction, and mankind could awaken from its worst nightmare.

A man lives in the belief that everything going through his mind is poisoned and must be avoided forever as of this moment. Reducing all existing things to the unknown is his only salvation. To protect the unknown against himself, he invents a method of *thinking nothing*. He succeeds in realizing it; the world around him blossoms again.

Each of your words turns into a swarm of mosquitoes in her; and you're surprised when they return to you as bites.

An exchange of habits: I'll give you this one, you give me that one; the result is supposed to be a marriage.

The moral kitsch of the Puritan: in his deepest and most contrite self-accusal, he still presents himself a hundred times better than he is.

How many habits does one need to move about in the unhabitual?

A country in which giant women run about with their tiny husbands in their pockets. When these women get into arguments, they suddenly pull their husbands from their pockets and hold them towards one another like tiny scare-gods.

He imagines he has to change each sentence he ever spoke or wrote. It's not enough to change the sentences within reach; he has to find all the

lost ones too; track them down, grab them, bring them back. He cannot relax until he has every last one. An infernal punishment for all who had a wrong faith.

The last of the month, I climb down into my ruins, a ridiculous lamp in my right hand, and I tell myself the deeper I go: it's no use. What faith can lead to the core of the earth? Whatever you, whatever another, whatever each of us does—it's no use. Oh, vanity of all strivings, the victims keep falling, by the thousands, the millions; this life, whose holiness you want to feign, is sacred to no one and nothing. No secret power wishes to maintain it. Perhaps no secret power wishes to destroy it, but it does destroy itself. How should a life that is constructed like a bowel have any value? Among plants, everything may have been better constructed—but what do you really know about the torment of suffocation?

Oh, nausea reaches out everywhere, and nausea comes from feeding. Everything is infected by food, everything is addicted to food. The peaceful day that some people experience is hypocritical. The torn-up things are more true. The peaceful ones envelop earth with the leaves and slowness of plants, but these nets are weak, and even where they are victorious, the fleshly destruction continues under their green covers. The powerful man swaggers about with his biggest stomach, and the vain man is iridescent in all the colors of his innards. Art plays a dance for the digesting and suffocating. It gets better and better, and its legacy is guarded as the most precious good. Some people delude themselves with the idea that things could come to an end, and they calculate catastrophes on top of catastrophes. But the deeper intention of this torment is an eternal one. The earth remains young, its life multiplies, and new, more complicated, more distinct, or more complete forms of wretchedness are devised. One man pleads with another: Help me, make it worse!

The people one relies on, and the people who rely on one: a comedy.

To think that there could be another life behind this one, and ours would be the relaxing one, in which those people rest up!

To find a comet for all the fear in the world and then send it, thus charged, into the wilderness of the universe, a scape-comet.